

# ● Blueprint FOR READING

## Into • *Cat on the Go*

Human-interest stories are stories that deal with the challenges and joys of coping with the problems of everyday life. Human-interest stories deal with birth, the joy and pain of growing up, loneliness and popularity, poverty and riches, and illness and death.

*Cat on the Go* is an example of a story that portrays the human emotions of kindness, loyalty, and generosity. Though its main character seems to be a spirited cat, in reality this story deals with the people who are touched and changed by coming into contact with this lively animal.

## Focus

When you read *Cat on the Go*, you will find that every single character is a giving person. As you meet each character—even a minor one—ask yourself what form this quality of “giving” takes in that person. “Giving” can include something as great as performing hours of surgery to save a cat’s life or as small as welcoming someone with a smile and a cup of tea. What does the cat give to the humans who love him?

## About the Author

Scottish author **JAMES HERRIOT** was actually a veterinarian named James Alfred Wight. Wight served the Yorkshire countryside for over fifty years. He began to write about his experiences under the pen name of James Herriot as an older adult. Herriot recounted his memoirs as if he were telling a story to a friend. In his work, he captured the strength and unpretentious life of the Yorkshire people. At the time of his death in 1995, Herriot was an established author appreciated by readers of all ages.

# Cat on the Go

James Herriot



One winter evening Tristan shouted up the stairs from the passage far below.

“Jim! Jim!”

I went out and stuck my head over the bannisters. “What is it, Triss?”

“Sorry to bother you, Jim, but could you come down for a minute?” The upturned face had an anxious look.

I went down the long flights of steps two at a time and when I arrived slightly breathless on the ground floor Tristan beckoned me through to the consulting room at the back of the house. A teenage girl was standing by the table, her hand resting on a stained roll of blanket.

“It’s a cat,” Tristan said. He pulled back a fold of the blanket and I looked down at a large, deeply striped tabby. At least he would have been large if he had had any flesh on his bones, but ribs and pelvis stood out painfully through the fur and as I passed my hand over the motionless body I could feel only a thin covering of skin.

Tristan cleared his throat. “There’s something else, Jim.”

I looked at him curiously. For once he didn’t seem to have a joke in him. I watched as he gently lifted one of the cat’s hind legs and rolled the abdomen into view. There was a gash on the ventral<sup>1</sup> surface through which a coiled cluster of intestines spilled grotesquely onto the cloth. I was still shocked and staring when the girl spoke.

“I saw this cat sittin’ in the dark, down Brown’s yard. I thought ’e looked skinny, like, and a bit quiet and I bent down to give ’im a pat. Then I saw ’e was badly hurt and I went home for a blanket and brought ’im round to you.”

“That was kind of you,” I said. “Have you any idea who he belongs to?”

The girl shook her head. “No, he looks like a stray to me.”

“He does indeed.” I dragged my eyes away from the terrible wound. “You’re Marjorie Simpson, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“I know your Dad well. He’s our postman.”

“That’s right.” She gave a half smile then her lips trembled.

1. The *ventral* (VEN tril) *surface* is the surface near or on the belly.

**Word Bank**    **gash** (GASH) *n.*: cut or wound

“Well, I reckon I’d better leave ’im with you. You’ll be going to put him out of his misery. There’s nothing anybody can do about...about that?”

I shrugged and shook my head. The girl’s eyes filled with tears, she stretched out a hand and touched the emaciated animal then turned and walked quickly to the door.

“Thanks again, Marjorie,” I called after the retreating back. “And don’t worry—we’ll look after him.”

In the silence that followed, Tristan and I looked down at the shattered animal. Under the surgery lamp it was all too easy to see. He had almost been disemboweled<sup>2</sup> and the pile of intestines was covered in dirt and mud.

“What d’you think did this?” Tristan said at length. “Has he been run over?”

“Maybe,” I replied. “Could be anything. An attack by a big dog or somebody could have kicked him or struck him.” All things were possible with cats because some people seemed to regard them as fair game for any cruelty.

Tristan nodded. “Anyway, whatever happened, he must have been on the verge of starvation. He’s a skeleton. I bet he’s wandered miles from home.”

“Ah well,” I sighed. “There’s only one thing to do. Those guts are perforated in several places. It’s hopeless.”

Tristan didn’t say anything but he whistled under his breath and drew the tip of his forefinger again and again across the furry cheek. And, unbelievably, from somewhere in the scraggy chest a gentle purring arose.

The young man looked at me, round eyed. “My G-d, do you hear that?”

“Yes...amazing in that condition. He’s a good-natured cat.”

Tristan, head bowed, continued his stroking. I knew how he felt because, although he preserved a cheerfully hard-boiled attitude to our patients he

couldn’t kid me about one thing; he had a soft spot for cats. Even now, when we are both around the sixty mark, he often talks to me about the cat he has had for many years. It is a typical relationship—they tease each other unmercifully—but it is based on real affection.

“It’s no good, Triss,” I said gently. “It’s got to be done.” I reached for the syringe but something in me rebelled against plunging a needle into that mutilated body. Instead I pulled a fold of the blanket over the cat’s head.

“Pour a little ether onto the cloth,” I said. “He’ll just sleep away.”

Wordlessly, Tristan unscrewed the cap of the ether bottle and poised it above the head. Then from under the shapeless heap of blanket we heard it again; the deep purring which increased in volume till it boomed in our ears like a distant motorcycle.

Tristan was like a man turned to stone, hand gripping the bottle rigidly, eyes staring down at the mound of cloth from which the purring rose in waves of warm friendly sound.

At last he looked up at me and gulped. “I don’t fancy this much, Jim. Can’t we do something?”

“You mean, put that lot back?”

“Yes.”

“But the bowels are damaged—they’re like a sieve in parts.”

“We could stitch them, couldn’t we?”

I lifted the blanket and looked again. “Honestly, Triss, I wouldn’t know where to start. And the whole thing is filthy.”

He didn’t say anything, but continued to look at me steadily. And I

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2. *Disemboweled* (DISS im BOU ild) means that he had no intestines.

## Word Bank

**emaciated** (ih MAY shee AYT id)  
*adj.*: wasted away physically;  
malnourished

didn't need much persuading. I had no more desire to pour ether onto that comradely purring than he had.

"Come on, then," I said. "We'll have a go."

With the oxygen bubbling and the cat's head in the anesthetic mask we washed the whole prolapse<sup>3</sup> with warm saline.<sup>4</sup> We did it again and again but it was impossible to remove every fragment of caked dirt. Then we started the painfully slow business of stitching the many holes in the tiny intestines, and here I was glad of Tristan's nimble fingers which seemed better able to manipulate the small round-bodied needles than mine.

Two hours and yards of catgut<sup>5</sup> later, we dusted the patched up peritoneal<sup>6</sup> surface with sulfanilamide<sup>7</sup> and pushed the entire mass back into the abdomen. When I had sutured muscle layers and skin everything looked tidy but I had a nasty feeling of sweeping undesirable things under the carpet. The extensive damage, all that contamination—peritonitis<sup>8</sup> was inevitable.

"He's alive, anyway, Triss," I said as we began to wash the instruments. "We'll put him onto sulfapyridine and hope for the best." There were still no antibiotics at that time but the new drug was a big advance.

The door opened and Helen came in. "You've been a long time, Jim." She walked over to the table and looked down at the sleeping cat. "What a poor skinny little thing. He's all bones."

"You should have seen him when he came in." Tristan switched off the sterilizer and screwed shut the valve on the anesthetic machine. "He looks a lot better now."

She stroked the little animal for a moment. "Is he badly injured?"

"I'm afraid so, Helen," I said. "We've done our best for him but I honestly don't think he has much chance."

"What a shame. And he's pretty, too. Four white feet and all those unusual colors." With her finger she traced the faint bands of auburn and copper-gold among the gray and black.

Tristan laughed. "Yes, I think that chap has a ginger Tom somewhere in his ancestry."

Helen smiled, too, but absently, and I noticed a broody look about her. She hurried out to the stock room and returned with an empty box.

"Yes...yes..." she said thoughtfully. "I can make a bed in this box for him and he'll sleep in our room, Jim."

"He will?"

"Yes, he must be warm, mustn't he?"

"Of course."

Later, in the darkness of our bed-sitter,<sup>9</sup> I looked from my pillow at a cozy scene. Sam in his basket on one side of the flickering fire and the cat cushioned and blanketed in his box on the other.

As I floated off into sleep it was good to know that my patient was so comfortable, but I wondered if he would be alive in the morning...

I knew he was alive at 7:30 a.m. because my wife was already up and talking to him. I trailed across the room in my pajamas and the cat and I looked

3. *Prolapse* (PRO laps) is an internal organ that has fallen out.

4. *Saline* (SAY leen) is a salt solution.

5. *Catgut* (KAT GUT) is a strong thread used in surgery.

6. *Peritoneal* (PAIR it un EE ul) means concerning the membrane that lines the abdomen.

7. *Sulfanilamide* (SUL fuh NIL uh MYD) is a sulfa drug that was used to treat infections before penicillin was discovered.

8. *Peritonitis* (PAIR it un IYT ess) is an infection of the internal organs.

9. A *bed-sitter* is a one-room apartment.

## Word Bank

**inevitable** (in EV it uh bul) *adj.*: unavoidable

at each other. I rubbed him under the chin and he opened his mouth in a rusty miaow. But he didn't try to move.

"Helen," I said. "This little thing is tied together inside with catgut. He'll have to live on fluids for a week and even then he probably won't make it. If he stays up here you'll be spooning milk into him umpteen times a day."

"Okay, okay." She had that broody look again.

It wasn't only milk she spooned into him over the next few days. Beef essence, strained broth and a succession of sophisticated baby foods found their way down his throat at regular intervals. One lunch time I found Helen kneeling by the box.

"We shall call him Oscar," she said.

"You mean we're keeping him?"

"Yes."

I am fond of cats but we already had a dog in our cramped quarters and I could see difficulties. Still I decided to let it go.

"Why Oscar?"

"I don't know." Helen tipped a few drops of chop gravy onto the little red tongue and watched intently as he swallowed.

I was pleased at the way things were going. I had been giving the sulfapyridine every six hours and taking the temperature night and morning, expecting all the time to encounter the roaring fever, the vomiting and the tense abdomen of peritonitis. But it never happened.

It was as though Oscar's animal instinct told him he had to move as little as possible because he lay absolutely still day after day and looked up at us—and purred.

His purr became part of our lives and when he eventually left his bed, sauntered through to our kitchen and began to sample Sam's dinner of meat and biscuit it was a moment of triumph. And I didn't spoil it by wondering if he

was ready for solid food; I felt he knew.

From then on it was sheer joy to watch the furry scarecrow fill out and grow strong, and as he ate and ate the flesh spread over his bones. The true beauty of his coat showed in the glossy medley of auburn, black and gold. We had a handsome cat on our hands.

Once Oscar had fully recovered, Tristan was a regular visitor.

He probably felt, and rightly, that he, more than I, had saved Oscar's life in the first place and he used to play with him for long periods. His favorite ploy was to push his leg round the corner of the table and withdraw it repeatedly just as the cat pawed at it.

Oscar was justifiably irritated by this teasing but showed his character by lying in wait for Tristan one night and biting him smartly<sup>10</sup> in the ankle before he could start his tricks.

From my own point of view Oscar added many things to our menage.<sup>11</sup> Sam was delighted with him and the two soon became firm friends, Helen adored him and each evening I thought afresh that a nice cat washing his face by the hearth gave extra comfort to a room.

Oscar had been established as one of the family for several weeks when I came in from a late call to find Helen waiting for me with a stricken face.

"What's happened?" I asked.

"It's Oscar—he's gone!"

"Gone? What do you mean?"

"Oh, Jim, I think he's run away."

I stared at her. "He wouldn't do that. He often goes down to the garden at night. Are you sure he isn't there?"

"Absolutely. I've searched right into

10. Here, *smartly* means forcefully.

11. A *menage* (muh NAAZH) is a household.

## Word Bank

**ploy** (PLOY) *n.*: a playful game; a plan or tactic that is different from ordinary contact





the yard. I've even had a walk round the town. And remember." Her chin quivered. "He...he ran away from somewhere before."

I looked at my watch. "Ten o'clock. Yes, that is strange. He shouldn't be out at this time."

As I spoke the front door bell jangled. I galloped down the stairs and as I rounded the corner in the passage I could see Mrs. Heslington, the vicar's wife, through the glass. I threw open the door. She was holding Oscar in her arms.

"I believe this is your cat, Mr. Herriot," she said.

"It is indeed, Mrs. Heslington. Where did you find him?"

She smiled. "Well it was rather odd. We were having a meeting of the Mothers' Union at the house and we noticed the cat sitting there in the room."

"Just sitting...?"

"Yes, as though he were listening to what we were saying and enjoying it

all. It was unusual. When the meeting ended I thought I'd better bring him along to you."

"I'm most grateful, Mrs. Heslington." I snatched Oscar and tucked him under my arm. "My wife is distraught—she thought he was lost."

It was a little mystery. Why should he suddenly take off like that? But since he showed no change in his manner over the ensuing week we put it out of our minds.

Then one evening a man brought in a dog for a distemper<sup>12</sup> inoculation and left the front door open. When I went up to our flat I found that Oscar had disappeared again. This time Helen and

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12. *Distemper* (diss TEM pur) is an infectious virus disease.

## Word Bank

**inoculation** (in OCK yoo LAY shun) *n.*: vaccination



I scoured the marketplace and side alleys in vain and when we returned at half past nine we were both despondent. It was nearly eleven and we were thinking of bed when the doorbell rang.

It was Oscar again, this time resting on the ample stomach of Jack Newbould. Jack was a gardener at one of the big houses. He hiccuped gently and gave me a huge benevolent smile. “Brought your cat, Mr. Herriot.”

“Gosh, thanks, Jack!” I said, scooping up Oscar gratefully. “Where the devil did you find him?”

“Well, s’matter o’ fact ’e sort of found me.”

“What do you mean?”

Jack closed his eyes for a few moments before articulating carefully. “Thish is a big night, tha knows, Mr. Herriot. Darts championship. Lots of t’lads round at t’Dog and Gun—lotsh and lotsh of ’em. Big gatherin’.”

“And our cat was there?”

“Aye, he were there, all right. Sitting among t’lads. Shpent t’whole evenin’ with us.”

“Just sat there, eh?”

“That ’e did.” Jack giggled reminiscently. “My ’e enjoyed ’isself. Ah gave ’em a drop out of me own glass and once or twice ah thought ’e was going to have a go at chuckin’ a dart. He’s some cat.” He laughed again.

As I bore Oscar upstairs I was deep in thought. What was going on here? These sudden desertions were upsetting Helen and I felt they could get on my nerves in time.

I didn’t have long to wait till the next one. Three nights later he was missing again. This time Helen and I didn’t bother to search—we just waited.

He was back earlier than usual. I heard the doorbell at nine o’clock. It was the elderly Miss Simpson peering through the glass. And she wasn’t holding Oscar—he was prowling on the mat waiting to come in.

Miss Simpson watched with interest as the cat stalked inside and made for the stairs. “Ah, good, I’m so glad he’s come home safely. I knew he was your cat and I’ve been intrigued by his behavior all evening.”

“Where...may I ask?”

“Oh, at the Women’s Institute. He came in shortly after we started and stayed there till the end.”

“Really? What exactly was your program, Miss Simpson?”

“Well, there was a bit of committee

## Word Bank

**benevolent** (ben EV uh lint) *adj.*: kind and generous; inclined to doing good

**articulating** (AR tick yoo LAYT ing) *v.*: pronouncing clearly



stuff, then a short talk with lantern slides by Mr. Walters from the water company and we finished with a cake-making competition.”

“Yes...yes...and what did Oscar do?”

She laughed. “Mixed with the company, apparently enjoyed the slides and showed great interest in the cakes.”

“I see. And you didn’t bring him home?”

“No, he made his own way here. As you know, I have to pass your house and I merely rang your bell to make sure you knew he had arrived.”

“I’m obliged to you, Miss Simpson. We were a little worried.”

I mounted the stairs in record time. Helen was sitting with the cat on her knee and she looked up as I burst in.

“I know about Oscar now,” I said.

“Know what?”

“Why he goes on these nightly outings. He’s not running away—he’s visiting.”

“Visiting?”

“Yes,” I said. “Don’t you see? He likes getting around, he loves people, especially in groups, and he’s interested in what they do. He’s a natural mixer.”

Helen looked down at the attractive mound of fur curled on her lap. “Of course...that’s it...he’s a socialite!”

“Exactly, a high stepper!”

“A cat-about-town!”

It all afforded us some innocent laughter and Oscar sat up and looked at us with evident pleasure, adding his own throbbing purr to the merriment. But for Helen and me there was a lot of relief behind it; ever since our cat had started his excursions there had been the gnawing fear that we would lose him, and now we felt secure.

From that night our delight in him increased. There was endless joy in watching this facet of his character unfolding. He did the social round meticulously, taking in most of the

activities of the town. He became a familiar figure at whist drives,<sup>13</sup> jumble sales,<sup>14</sup> school concerts and scout bazaars. Most of the time he was made welcome, but was twice ejected from meetings of the Rural District Council who did not seem to relish the idea of a cat sitting in on their deliberations.

At first I was apprehensive about his making his way through the streets but I watched him once or twice and saw that he looked both ways before tripping daintily across. Clearly he had excellent traffic sense and this made me feel that his original injury had not been caused



13. *Whist drives* are attempts to raise money by playing whist, a card game.

14. *Jumble sales* are sales of donated articles to raise money for charity.

## Word Bank

**excursions** (ex CER zhuns) *n.*: brief, pleasure trips

**meticulously** (meh TICK yoo lus lee) *adv.*: extremely careful in the treatment of details

**apprehensive** (APP re HEN siv) *adj.*: uneasy; concerned; viewing the future with anxiety or



by a car.

Taking it all in all, Helen and I felt that it was a kind stroke of fortune which had brought Oscar to us. He was a warm and cherished part of our home life. He added to our happiness.

When the blow fell it was totally unexpected.

I was finishing the evening surgery.<sup>15</sup> I looked round the door and saw only a man and two little boys.

"Next, please," I said.

The man stood up. He had no animal with him. He was middle-aged, with the rough weathered face of a farm worker. He twirled a cloth cap nervously in his hands.

"Mr. Herriot?" he said.

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

He swallowed and looked me straight in the eyes. "Ah think you've got ma cat."

"What?"

"Ah lost ma cat a bit since." He cleared his throat. "We used to live at Misson but ah got a job as plowman to Mr. Horne of Wederly. It was after we moved to Wederly that t'cat went missin'. Ah reckon he was tryin' to find 'is way back to his old home."

"Wederly? That's on the other side of Brawton—over thirty miles away."

"Aye, ah know, but cats is funny things."

"But what makes you think I've got him?"

He twisted the cap around a bit more. "There's a cousin o' mine lives in Darrowby and ah heard tell from 'im about this cat that goes around to meetin's. I 'ad to come. We've been huntin' everywhere."

"Tell me," I said. "This cat you lost. What did he look like?"

"Gray and black and sort o' gingery. Right bonny<sup>16</sup> 'e was. And 'e was allus goin' out to gatherin's."

A cold hand clutched my heart. "You'd better come upstairs. Bring the

boys with you."

Helen was putting some coal on the fire of the bed-sitter.

"Helen," I said. "This is Mr.—er—I'm sorry, I don't know your name."

"Gibbons, Sep Gibbons. They called me Septimus because ah was the seventh in family and it looks like ah'm goin' t'same way 'cause we've got six already. These are our two youngest." The two boys, obvious twins of about eight, looked up at us solemnly.

I wished my heart would stop hammering. "Mr. Gibbons thinks Oscar is his. He lost his cat some time ago."

My wife put down her little shovel. "Oh...Oh...I see." She stood very still for a moment then smiled faintly. "Do sit down, Oscar's in the kitchen. I'll bring him through."

She went out and reappeared with the cat in her arms. She hadn't got through the door before the little boys gave tongue.

"Tiger!" they cried. "Oh, Tiger, Tiger!"

The man's face seemed lit from within. He walked quickly across the floor and ran his big work-roughened hand along the fur.

"Hullo, awd lad," he said, and turned to me with a radiant smile. "It's 'im, Mr. Herriot. It's 'im awright, and don't 'e look well!"

"You call him Tiger, eh?" I said.

"Aye," he replied happily. "It's them gingery stripes. The kids called 'im that. They were brokenhearted when we lost 'im."

As the two little boys rolled on the floor our Oscar rolled with them, pawing playfully, purring with delight.

Sep Gibbons sat down again. "That's the way 'e allus wen on wi' the family. They used to play with 'im for hours. We did miss 'im. He were a right

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15. *Surgery* means the work done by a surgeon.

16. *Bonny* (BAHN ee) is a British term for attractive.

favorite.”

I looked at the broken nails on the edge of the cap, at the decent, honest, uncomplicated Yorkshire<sup>17</sup> face so like the many I had grown to like and respect. Farm men like him got thirty shillings a week in those days and it was reflected in the threadbare jacket, the cracked, shiny boots and the obvious hand-me-downs of the boys.

But all three were scrubbed and tidy, the man’s face like a red beacon, the children’s knees gleaming and their hair carefully slicked across their foreheads. They looked like nice people to me. I didn’t know what to say.

Helen said it for me. “Well, Mr. Gibbons.” Her tone had an unnatural brightness. “You’d better take him.”

The man hesitated. “Now then, are ye sure, Missis Herriot?”

“Yes...yes. I’m sure. He was your cat first.”

“Aye, but some folks ’ud say finders keepers or summat like that. Ah didn’t come ’ere to demand ’im back or owt of t’sort.”

“I know you didn’t, Mr. Gibbons, but you’ve had him all those years and you’ve searched for him so hard. We couldn’t possibly keep him from you.”

He nodded quickly. “Well, that’s right good of ye.” He paused for a moment, his face serious, then he stooped and picked Oscar up. “We’ll have to be off if we’re goin’ to catch the eight o’clock bus.”

Helen reached forward, cupped the cat’s head in her hands and looked at him steadily for a few seconds. Then she patted the boys’ heads. “You’ll take good care of him, won’t you?”

“Aye, missis, thank ye, we will that.” The two small faces looked up at her and smiled.

“I’ll see you down the stairs, Mr. Gibbons,” I said.

On the descent I tickled the furry cheek resting on the man’s shoulder and

heard for the last time the rich purring. On the front door step we shook hands and they set off down the street. As they rounded the corner of Trengate they stopped and waved and I waved back at the man, the two children and the cat’s head looking back at me over the shoulder.

It was my habit at that time in my life to mount the stairs two or three at a time but on this occasion I trailed upward like an old man, slightly breathless, throat tight, eyes prickling.

I cursed myself for a sentimental fool but as I reached our door I found a flash of consolation. Helen had taken it remarkably well. She had nursed that cat and grown deeply attached to him, and I’d have thought an unforeseen calamity like this would have upset her terribly. But no, she had behaved calmly and rationally.

It was up to me to do as well. I adjusted my features into the semblance of a cheerful smile and marched into the room.

Helen had pulled a chair close to the table and was slumped face down against the wood. One arm cradled her head while the other was stretched in front of her as her body shook with an utterly abandoned weeping.

I had never seen her like this and I was appalled. I tried to say something comforting but nothing stemmed the flow of racking sobs.

Feeling helpless and inadequate I could only sit close to her and stroke the back of her head. Maybe I could have said something if I hadn’t felt just about as bad myself.

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17. *Yorkshire* (YORK sheer) is a county in England.

## Word Bank

**sentimental** (SENT im EN tul) *adj.*: having or showing tender feelings

You get over these things in time. After all, we told ourselves, it wasn't as though Oscar had died or got lost again—he had gone to a good family who would look after him. In fact he had really gone home.

And of course, we still had our much-loved Sam, although he didn't help in the early stages by sniffing disconsolately where Oscar's bed used to lie then collapsing on the rug with a long lugubrious sigh.

There was one other thing, too. I had a little notion forming in my mind, an idea which I would spring on Helen when the time was right. It was about a month after that shattering night and we were coming out of the concert at Brawton at the end of our half day. I looked at my watch.

"Only eight o'clock," I said. "How about going to see Oscar?"

Helen looked at me in surprise. "You mean—drive on to Wederly?"

"Yes, it's only about five miles."

A smile crept slowly across her face. "That would be lovely. But do you think they would mind?"

"The Gibbons? No. I'm sure they wouldn't. Let's go."

Wederly was a big village and the plowman's cottage was at the far end. I pushed open the garden gate and we walked down the path.

A busy-looking little woman answered my knock. She was drying her hands on a striped towel.

"Mrs. Gibbons?" I said.

"Aye, that's me."

"I'm James Herriot—and this is my wife."

Her eyes widened uncomprehendingly. Clearly the name meant nothing to her.

"We had your cat for a while," I added.

Suddenly she grinned and waved her

towel at us. "Oh aye, ah remember now. Sep told me about you. Come in, come in!"

The big kitchen-living room was a tableau<sup>18</sup> of life with six children and thirty shillings a week. Battered furniture, rows of much-mended washing on a pulley, black cooking range and a general air of chaos.

Sep got up from his place by the fire, put down his newspaper, took off a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles and shook hands.

He waved Helen to a sagging armchair. "Well, it's right nice to see you. Ah've often spoke of ye to t'missis."

His wife hung up her towel. "Yes, and I'm glad to meet ye both. I'll get some tea in a minnit."

She laughed and dragged a bucket of muddy water into a corner. "I've been washin' football jerseys. Them lads just handed them to me tonight—as if I haven't enough to do."

As she ran the water into the kettle I peeped surreptitiously around me and I noticed Helen doing the same. But we searched in vain. There was no sign of a cat. Surely he couldn't have run away again? With a growing feeling of dismay I realized that my little scheme could backfire devastatingly.

It wasn't until the tea had been made and poured that I dared to raise the subject.

"How—" I asked diffidently. "How is—er—Tiger?"

"Oh, he's grand," the little woman replied briskly. She glanced at the clock

18. A *tableau* (TAB loe) is a dramatic scene.

## Word Bank

**uncomprehendingly** (un CAHM pre HEND ing lee) *adv.*: without understanding

on the mantelpiece. “He should be back any time now, then you’ll be able to see ’im.”

As she spoke, Sep raised a finger. “Ah think ah can hear ’im now.”

He walked over and opened the door and our Oscar strode in with all his old grace and majesty. He took one look at Helen and leaped onto her lap. With a cry of delight she put down her cup and stroked the beautiful fur as the cat arched himself against her hand and the familiar purr echoed round the room.

“He knows me,” she murmured. “He knows me.”

Sep nodded and smiled. “He does that. You were good to ’im. He’ll never forget ye, and we won’t either, will we mother?”

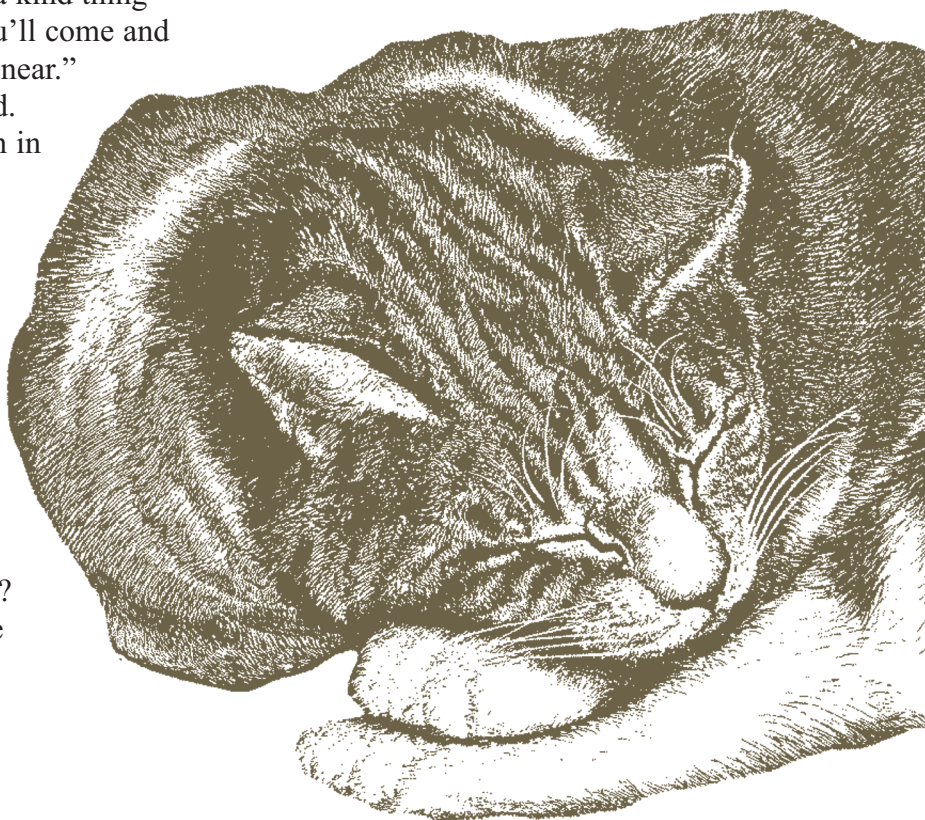
“No, we won’t, Mrs. Herriot,” his wife said as she applied butter to a slice of gingerbread. “That was a kind thing ye did for us and I ’ope you’ll come and see us all whenever you’re near.”

“Well, thank you,” I said. “We’d love to—we’re often in Brawton.”

I went over and tickled Oscar’s chin, then I turned again to Mrs. Gibbons. “By the way, it’s after nine o’clock. Where has he been till now?”

She poised her butter knife and looked into space.

“Let’s see, now,” she said. “It’s Thursday, isn’t it? Ah yes, it’s ’is night for the Yoga class.”





# ● Studying THE SELECTION

## Recalling

1. Why did Tristan want to save the cat even though it was badly injured?
2. What did Helen do to help the cat recover from his injuries?
3. How did the cat's original owners find out where the cat was?

## Interpreting

4. Why did Herriot decide to attempt to save the cat's life? Was it a reaction to something the cat did, or was it connected to his friendship with Tristan?
5. What was special about the cat? Give two examples of how he displayed this extraordinary trait.
6. Why was it hard for Herriot and Helen to return the cat to its rightful owners? What did Herriot and Helen do to ease this adjustment?

## Concluding

7. Why did Herriot and his wife become so emotionally attached to this cat?
8. Do you think they will continue visiting the cat? If you feel their visits will end, when do you think they will stop?

## Examining Nonfiction

Human-interest stories deal with people's reaction to a real-life crisis. In this story, the arrival of the cat in Herriot's office forced him to consider his responsibility to care for a severely injured animal. Herriot felt an obligation to assure this animal's recovery.

1. Were other characters in this story affected by the cat's personality? How?
2. Were the cat's original owners changed by the cat's disappearance and later reappearance?
3. How did the relationship between Herriot, his wife, and the cat's original owners develop in this story?

## Thinking About Nonfiction

One of the challenges of writing stories about animals is the need to make them seem realistic. The author must create a personality for the animal that is true to its nature, yet is still interesting enough for the reader to consider appealing. Somehow the author must make the animal attractive without being unrealistic. It has to appear real both to animal lovers and to readers who are not familiar with the habits of the animals involved. Do you think Herriot's portrait of the cat is realistic in comparison to other stories you have read about cats and other small animals?

## Creating and Writing

One of the outcomes of this story is the opportunity that Herriot and Helen received when they developed a friendship with the Gibbons family. Try to imagine a situation where you or a friend find a lost pet. Imagine the steps you would take to return this pet to its rightful owners.

1. Do you think your life might be changed as you attempt to find the people who lost this pet?
2. How would you describe your meeting with the pet's original owners?

As an alternative assignment, imagine finding a lost item.

1. What steps would you take to return this item?
2. How would the search for the item's rightful owner change your life?
3. How would you describe your meeting with the rightful owner of the lost item?
4. What could happen as a result of this meeting?